

Good afternoon Senators. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my comments today.

My name is Judy Gafa and I serve as a trustee on the Grosse Pointe Board of Education.

As an elected official I represent my constituents who are strongly opposed to SB 624, for a large variety of reasons. I have traveled to Lansing these last couple of weeks to personally listen to testimony on the Education Reform Bills. As I sat and listened to all the various speakers it surprised me that many suggested practices to improve education have long been implemented with much success in the district I represent. As a school board trustee I am entrusted to educate every child who resides in my district, and partakes of the public school system. A hot button issue in the Grosse Pointe School district is class size. The parents who reside in my community have come to expect small class size; it is one of the many reasons they chose to buy a home in one of the Grosse Pointes. Budget constraints are starting to impact my ability as a board member to maintain those smaller class sizes. Senator you asked me what possible impact 60 extra out of district students would have on my district. My answer is, a large impact if it increased class size. I have heard many comments about competition to improve the education process, yet it seems to me that one of the aspects that make Grosse Pointe attractive to parents could be taken away if SB 624 passes.

I have a large concern about the definition of capacity. The bill states the district will decide if it has capacity. This could be left open to court interpretation and legal challenges. I can assure you the residents who reside in Grosse Pointe would define capacity much differently than a non-resident would. As a board member I would like to reserve the right of offering smaller class sizes if enrollment should decline. Not only is this what my constituents expect, but it is what they would demand.

I am also the mother of 3 children and as a mom I think every child in this state deserves an excellent education. As a mom I feel it is the States duty to offer a child an excellent education in their neighborhood, within their community. So that every child can walk to school, like my own children do. So that every child can attend school with friends from their neighborhood, like my children do. So that every child can play for their local team with great pride, just like my children do. Parents should be able to volunteer in their child's classroom and participate on the PTO like I do. There is no greater impact on a child's education than parental involvement. No parent should have to drive their student to another district, or go on a waiting list at a Charter school, to obtain an excellent education.

I firmly believe it behoove this committee to look at successful districts and model reform on the best practice within those districts.

It worries me that when we start making education a competition and that children are products to be vied for. It concerns me that this committee is looking at Indiana as a template, when there is no tangible evidence that those changes have been successful. I am saddened to think that teachers have been labeled public educations enemy number one, when I bet all 5 of you can think of a teacher who lit a spark in you or had an impact on your life. I am concerned that instead of fixing failing schools and finding viable long-term solutions, the problems are just being shuffled around.

Closing a neighborhood school should be a last resort; it should only occur if all other solutions fail. Other wise I fear for those children who will be left behind. I would suggest to this committee that a priority of this group of bills include providing excellent neighborhood schools. I think many people would agree that excellent schools are the corner stone of almost every viable community.

I know there is no easy solution and that it will take a multi pronged approach to solve many of educations problems. I did agree strongly with Dr. Bennett on one approach, and that is involving all of your stakeholders, educators, parents, and community members, school boards and then looks at the results. I ask you to be careful when promoting mandates, many times they have unintended consequences. I would also like to extend an invitation to all of to visit the Grosse Pointe Public school district. Thank you again for your time.